red eye

Friday
DECEMBER 4, 2015

★ FREE ★

A Chicago Tribune publication

JAKE NEWTON / REDEYE ILLUSTRATION

CONVERSATION PIECE

A CHICAGO-BASED SEX COMEDY ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE? LET THE DISCUSSION ON 'CHI-RAQ' CONTINUE. ***PAGES 12-15***

Can Bears get 2 wins in a row? ***6*** Pasta & more at Monteverde ***18*** Lolla extends to 4 days ***22***

BY SAMANTHA NELSON FOR REDEYE | REDEYE@REDEYECHICAGO.COM » GET MORE SPONTANEOUS EAT, DRINK, DO IDEAS AT REDEYECHICAGO.COM

EAT

HOLIDAY PIE SHOP POP-UP
David Burke's Primehouse
616 N. Rush St. 312-660-6000
Executive pastry chef Amanda Warren prepares mini pecan pies with whiskey caramel and pumpkin pies with sweet cream cheese ($5 for two or $25 for a dozen). People who buy pies can get a free cup of hot chocolate to go ($4 normally). 4-6 p.m. Friday.

FREE **NATIONAL COOKIE DAY**
Omni Chicago
676 N. Michigan Ave. 312-944-6664
A cart set up at Michigan Avenue and Huron Street doles out free cinnamon cream cheese spiral cookies from the hotel's 676 Restaurant & Bar. 11:30 a.m. Friday.

DRINK

ADULT ONESIE PARTY
The Stretch Bar & Grill *3485 N. Clark St. 773-755-3980*
Show off your comfiest nightwear for a shot at winning $100 and a pass to the TBOX Twelve Bars of Xmas pub crawl. Bring a nonperishable food item to donate to the Lakeview Pantry and get a discounted drink. 2-8 p.m. Sunday. No cover.

PROHIBITION REPEAL DAY
Southport & Irving
4000 N. Southport Ave. 773-857-2890
Celebrate legal drinking with a tasting and classic cocktail mixing demonstration from FEW Spirits, which takes its name from Prohibition advocate Frances E. Willard. You'll also take home a recipe and instruction booklet. 6-8 p.m. Friday. $25. Reservations recommended.

DO

STRAIGHT OUTTA LOAFERS
Loafers *2600 W. Lawrence Ave. 773-275-6020*
The Machine Tools, Doleful Lions, Justin Bowling and John Darnell perform at the second annual benefit concert for children at Swedish Covenant Hospital. Drink specials include $4 Bell's Two Hearted ale pints and Smirnoff, UV Vodka and Bacardi cocktails. 8 p.m. Saturday. $5 donation or a new, unwrapped toy.

3-DAY FORECAST

FRIDAY
49 32
Weekend!

SATURDAY
55 34
Warmer

SUNDAY
50 36
Hi, clouds

HAPPY HOUR OF THE DAY Get $1 oysters, three dishes for $25 and more from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday at CH Distillery (564 W. Randolph St. 312-707-8780).

A group of local church members pray for residents who live in the neighborhood where Wednesday's police shootout with suspects took place in San Bernardino, Calif. AP PHOTO

SAN BERNARDINO INCIDENT IS THIS YEAR'S 355TH MASS SHOOTING

By Christopher Ingraham
WASHINGTON POST

Wednesday's shooting at a holiday banquet for county employees in San Bernardino, Calif., in which 14 people were killed, marked the deadliest mass shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre three years ago.

Masked assailants—later identified as a husband-and-wife team—armed with assault rifles opened fire on the banquet, authorities said.

The suspects, killed in the aftermath of the shooting, were identified as Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 27. A family member said they had been married for two years and had a 6-month-old daughter.

Farook was a U.S. citizen, born in Illinois and a five-year employee of the government agency holding the holiday banquet. His co-workers said Farook, a Muslim, had traveled in recent years to the Middle East.

This is at least the third mass shooting since the rampage in Colorado Springs last Friday.

The San Bernardino shooting is the 355th mass shooting so far this year, according to a mass shooting tracker maintained by the Guns Are Cool subreddit. The Reddit tracker defines mass shootings as incidents in which four or more people, including the gunman, are killed or injured by gunfire.

The Mass Shooting Tracker is different from other shooting databases in that it uses a broader definition of mass shooting—the old FBI definition focused on four or more people killed as part of a single shooting.

The California shooting was also the second mass shooting on Wednesday alone—in the early morning hours, one person was killed and three were injured in an incident in Savannah, Ga.

Speaking after the Colorado Springs shooting last week, President Obama urged Americans to not let this type of violence "become normal." But the data show that this type of incident already is normal. There have been more mass shootings than calendar days so far this year. The number of mass shootings so far this year has already surpassed the total number of mass shootings in 2014, according to the Reddit tracker. And the pace is well above 2013's pace, when a total of 363 mass shootings occurred. **LOS ANGELES TIMES CONTRIBUTED.**

336 DAYS, 355 MASS SHOOTINGS

Number of mass shootings (4+ victims, including shooter) by day of year, 2015

WAPO.ST/WONKBLOG

SOURCE: MASS SHOOTING TRACKER

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Do I have to change my habits to please my guy?

Anna Pulley
redeye@redeyechicago.com
@annapulley

Dear Anna: Do you leave a guy whom you've been in a committed relationship with for over a year because he wants you to quit smoking and drinking (both of which I do occasionally)?
—Sincerely, Tough Decision

Dear TD,

I always thought smoking was a deal-breaker for me. Watching my dad battle lung cancer was one of the worst things I ever had to endure, and because of that, I told myself, no more.

Then I met my girlfriend. Who smokes. And as we tumbled farther and farther down the rabbit hole, the conviction I had about cigarettes suddenly couldn't compete with the sustained scorch of my heart.

So I told myself a new story. In this version, I had no control over anyone else, and my love for her was stronger than whatever future struggles we might one day have to face.

This doesn't mean we don't still fight about it. Or that I don't try consistently to get her to quit. We do, and I do. But my love is relentless, and I allowed myself to surrender to it. I thought often of a line from Susan Sontag about how, "It hurts to love. It's like giving yourself to be flayed and knowing that at any moment the other person may just walk off with your skin."

I'm wondering, in your case, whether your boyfriend is coming from a place of concern or one of control. If it's the latter, that raises some red flags. If it's the former, then I encourage you to delve deeper and hear each other out. You don't have to change your behaviors simply because he wants you to, but you should at least listen to his reasons. And he should listen to yours. What fears and vulnerabilities and dark spaces are lurking underneath his desire to want you to give up smoking and drinking? What worries and anxieties and longings surface when you aim a flashlight on your own choices and behaviors? And, perhaps most importantly, where do those desires converge in the Venn diagram of your relationship? How can you find the glorious middle where your wants and needs overlap? Is it, in fact, possible?

> We are all deeply flawed, but we are also capable of great compassion. Ask yourself if it's worth your while to embrace the less desirable parts of your relationship along with the fierce and forceful ones.

It's not really about the smoking or the drinking, ultimately. Those are surface dilemmas. (Unless they are destroying your life and you somehow left that part out, but I'm assuming not.) We are all deeply flawed, but we are also capable of great compassion. Ask yourself if it's worth your while to embrace the less desirable parts of your relationship along with the fierce and forceful ones.

Maybe it isn't, and you should move on. I can't really determine that from your short letter, but I do think that in between his request and your autonomy is a grace and tenderness that could be potentially explored.

Best of luck, TD.

ANNA PULLEY IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. WANT TO ASK ANNA AN ANONYMOUS QUESTION ABOUT LOVE, SEX OR DATING? EMAIL YOUR QUANDARY TO REDEYEDATING@GMAIL.COM.

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redeyechicago.com

General Manager: Maggie Wartik, @mwartik

CONTACT US
Newsroom: 312-222-4970 redeye@redeyechicago.com
Advertising: 312-527-8077 advertisingredeye@tribune.com
Classifieds: 312-222-2222
Circulation: redservice@tribune.com

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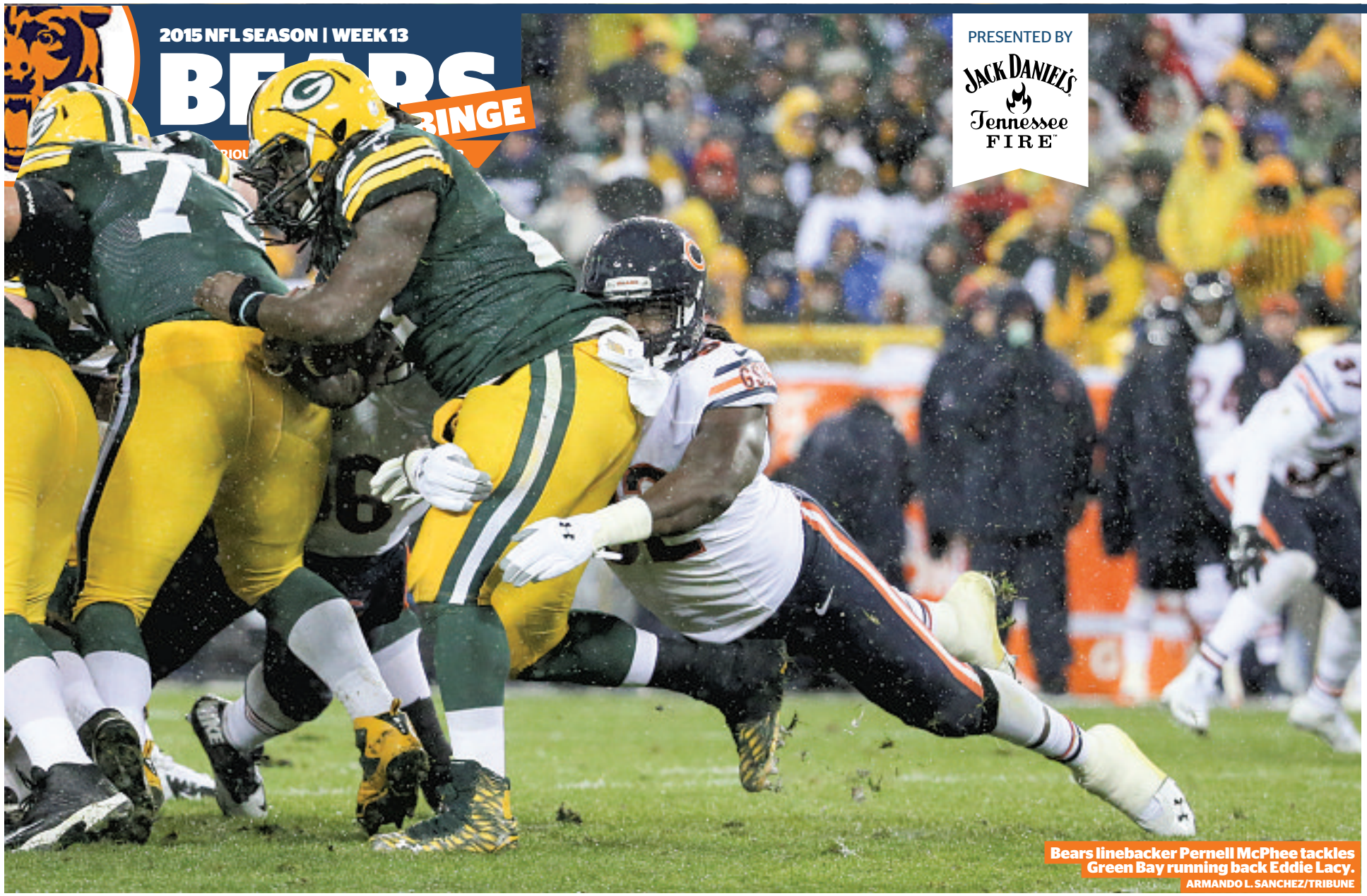


Bears linebacker Pernell McPhee tackles Green Bay running back Eddie Lacy.
ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/TRIBUNE

DRAMATIC BUT DANGEROUS

Joseph Tanksley
» redeye@redeyechicago.com
» @debauchery team

It's been a long time coming! Nothing feels better as a Bears fan than a victory over Green Bay.

Bears linebacker Pernell McPhee knows that firsthand as he and other Bears players took the game personally. Using Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers' comments in Week 1 ("It's always fun beating the Bears") as motivation, the defense handed Rodgers his worst game of the season, which made a lot of Bears fans happy. With all the emotion of beating Green Bay, it will be important for the Bears to not overlook their next opponent.

The Thanksgiving Day win puts the Bears at 5-6 as they play host to San Francisco. The 49ers come to Soldier Field with a 3-8 record and enough drama to film their own daytime soap opera. This team has been through a wringer of off-the-field issues, quarterback drama and dumb coaching decisions. Despite all that, the 49ers still have talent on both sides of the ball.

Colin Kaepernick
AP PHOTO

Wide receivers Anquan Boldin and Torrey Smith still have big-play ability, and linebacker NaVorro Bowman leads a defense that can still wreak havoc on opposing offenses. The Bears will have to continue their commitment to play mistake-free football on offense and improve their run defense to put this team away.

The Bears are ranked toward the bottom of the NFL in rushing defense (29th out of 32 teams), giving up 129 yards per game. Until they become more consistent in stopping the run, teams will try to exploit this weakness.

If the Bears are to make a push for the playoffs, the rush defense has to improve dramatically.

The final five games on the schedule are favorable for the Bears, but they will more than likely have to run the table for a legitimate chance at a wild-card berth. It's a long shot, but it should make for exciting football the rest of the season.

JOSEPH TANKSLEY IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR AND FORMER DEFENSIVE BACK AT BUTLER UNIVERSITY.

Chicago vs. San Francisco
noon Sunday, Fox

NFL Week 13 schedule

Thursday		
Green Bay	at Detroit	late
Sunday		
N.Y. Jets	at N.Y. Giants	noon CBS
Arizona	at St. Louis	noon Fox
Atlanta	at Tampa Bay	noon Fox
Seattle	at Minnesota	noon Fox
Jacksonville	at Tennessee	noon CBS
Houston	at Buffalo	noon CBS
Baltimore	at Miami	noon CBS
Cincinnati	at Cleveland	noon Fox
Kansas City	at Oakland	3:05 p.m. CBS
Denver	at San Diego	3:05 p.m. CBS
Philadelphia	at New England	3:25 p.m. Fox
Carolina	at New Orleans	3:25 p.m. Fox
Indianapolis	at Pittsburgh	7:30 p.m. NBC
Monday		
Dallas	at Washington	7:30 p.m. ESPN

CAN THE BEARS MAKE THE PLAYOFFS?

Mathematically, the Bears are absolutely in the hunt. Realistically, it's a long shot. But this is the NFL, and stranger things have happened. On the surface, the Bears seem to have the easiest road to catch wild-card leaders Seattle and Green Bay. Here's how the wild-card picture looks right now, with a glimpse of each team's strength of schedule down the stretch.

Team	Record	Record of final five opponents	Home/road remaining games
Green Bay	7-4	29-26	2/3
Seattle	6-5	27-28	2/3
Atlanta	6-5	35-20	2/3
Tampa Bay	5-6	20-25	3/2
N.Y. Giants	5-6	33-22	3/2
BEARS	**5-6**	**25-30**	**3/2**

SO MANY EMOTIONS!

By Chris Sosa | REDEYE

Players and coaches talk all about how they respect their opponents. Really, that's what they should do. But fans don't have to; they can let their emotions fly. Here are three things that will have fans buzzing before Sunday's game against San Francisco.

Their QB gets no respect

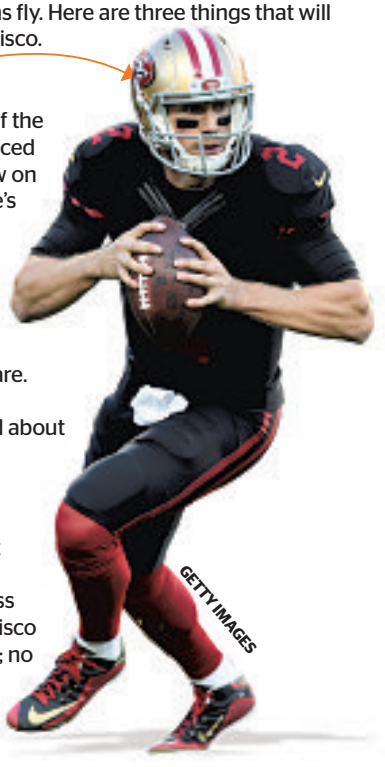
Colin Kaepernick, the 49ers' No. 1 quarterback at the start of the season, has fallen out of favor. So far that after he was replaced as the starter by **Blaine Gabbert**, Kaepernick's jersey is now on sale on the team's official merchandise site. Even though he's on injured reserve and won't play again this season, that's never a good sign.

Their coach is confusing

Jim Tomsula, who took over for Jim Harbaugh and his famous khakis, is closer to Yogi Berra than William Shakespeare. He gave the media this "gem" in explaining San Francisco's loss to Seattle in Week 11: "You can't go into a tackle worried about missing the tackle. You've just got to tackle." Huh?

They get blown out a lot

Don't expect a San Francisco comeback if the Bears get out to a big lead Sunday. Six of the Niners' eight defeats have come by a margin of 14 points or more, including a 43-18 loss to Pittsburgh and a 47-7 setback against Arizona. San Francisco has been outscored by a league-high 119 points this season; no other team has a points margin greater than 97 (the Bears have been outscored by 33 this season).



THE '85 BEARS ARE HOW OLD?

ICYMI, 2015 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1985 Bears, the last team to bring a Super Bowl title to Chicago. And as anyone who has experienced it knows, turning 30 can be a pain. Each week we'll give you an idea of what Bears fans who remember the magic of 1985 must be going through.

WHEN YOU TURN 30 ... you're expected to be a person with answers. **Football equivalent:** There is a dwindling number of "wise old veterans" for younger Bears to lean on. Only nine players on the 53-man roster are 30 or older, and the oldest is kicker Robbie Gould at 33. It's a young man's game, indeed.

#LagunaPicks

Instead of recruiting a human football expert to predict each Bears game, RedEye asked a sea lion. Because it's fun. Laguna, who lives at the Shedd Aquarium, will try his hand—er, flipper—at prognostication all season.

LAGUNA'S RECORD
» 6-5 after Week 12 (he correctly picked the Bears over the Packers last week)

FUN FACT
» Male California sea lions can go without food for three months. Because they do not have to leave their breeding ground to hunt for food, this helps protect their breeding territory.

MORE INFO
Visit **sheddaquarium.org**.

THIS WEEK'S PICK: Bears over 49ers.

MASKED

We can't always tell what's wrong with the Bears or Derrick Rose. As for these five, that would seem obvious.

Danielle Dwyer
@daniellewtoldit
Multimedia journalist/ producer

John Scholl
@johnmanbque
ManBQue co-founder

Jesse Valenciana
@jessemanbque
"Godfather" of ManBQue

Phil Thompson
@_phil_thompson
Tribune sports grunt

Lauren Chval
@lchval
RedEye contributor

1	**What are the chances the Bears get back to .500 this week?**	The same as watching Ohio State win the Big Ten championship. Oh, wait ...	I'd say as good as the chance of Jesse being late to an appointment.	Look, the Bears beat Green Bay. That's all I need. Well, that and all these beers.	Name one 49er besides Colin Kaepernick without Googling it. Zactly. Don't blow this, Bears.	Against the 49ers? No sweat.
2	**Why is Kobe Bryant in such a good mood lately?**	He knows what's to come after watching Derek Jeter go through his final season.	If I had months left until I retire, I'd be in a great mood too. But no! I still have 35 years.	Being in a good mood is a result of NO (BLEEPS) GIVEN, which stems from a pending retirement.	He's finally retiring. Being aloof to your teammates can be very taxing, you know.	Obama is probably going to name him the next poet laureate.
3	**By the time the holidays are over, the Cubs should have ...**	... the finishing touches to a lineup that will seal the deal in the 2016 World Series.	... a new marketing slogan with a theme of "this is the year," just like they do every year.	... come up with yet another way to scam their dumb fans. GO SOX!	... an ace-quality pitcher. If they have to kidnap Chris Sale, so be it.	... sent all of us a hilarious Christmas card.
4	**What are the advantages to Derrick Rose wearing his face mask all season?**	Preventive measures. He can never be too cautious, given his history.	I envision him singing "Man in the Mirror" while looking in the mirror with it on. It works for me.	The mask has superpowers that hide his basketball skills and make him invisible on the court.	At least when he gets slapped around in the playoffs, we'll have fingerprints.	He looks as uncomfortable as we feel.
5	**Wearing your wedding dress to a hockey game. The ultimate in dedication or just plain lazy?**	That's straight-up dedication. I mean, I dream of wearing mine to a baseball game.	I call it a cry for help. Sorry, husband dude, you're no Blackhawks player.	John Scholl once wore his wife's wedding dress to court. That was just plain ultimate lazy.	Are you kidding me? I'm so hanging out with this couple.	Girl, just change. That thing can't be comfortable.

FREE!

The Season in Lights
ZOOLIGHTS
PRESENTED BY ComEd AND powerSHARES QQQ
November 27–January 3 (Select Dates)
4:30–9 p.m.

Lincoln Park Zoo

Special Events

BrewLights Presented By Louis Glunz Beer
December 2

Members-Only Night at ZooLights
December 3

Adults Night Out at ZooLights
December 10

ZooLights Family Nights
December 14, 21 and 28

Ice Skating at Lincoln Park Zoo
Presented By PowerShares QQQ
November 27–February 28 (Select Dates)

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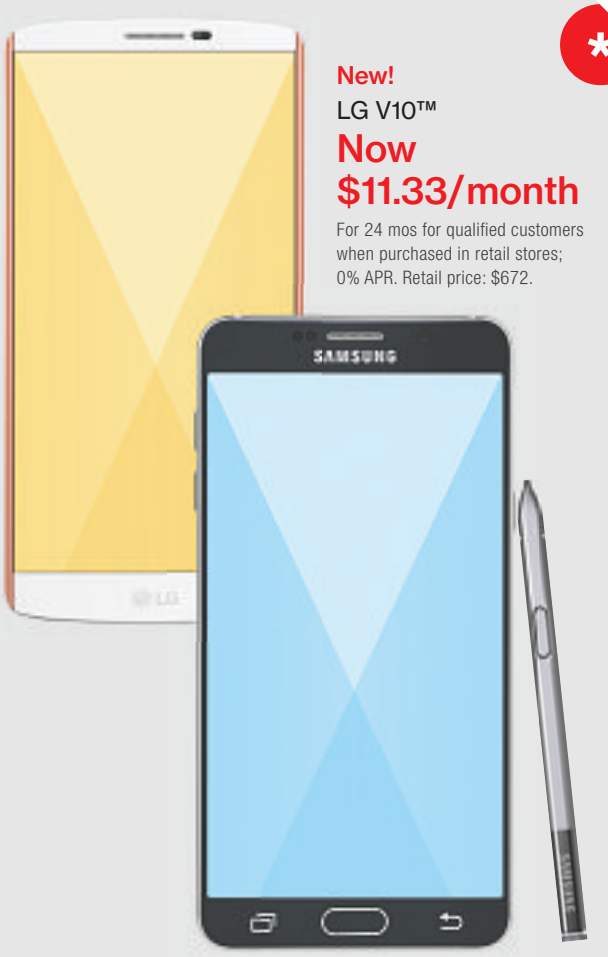

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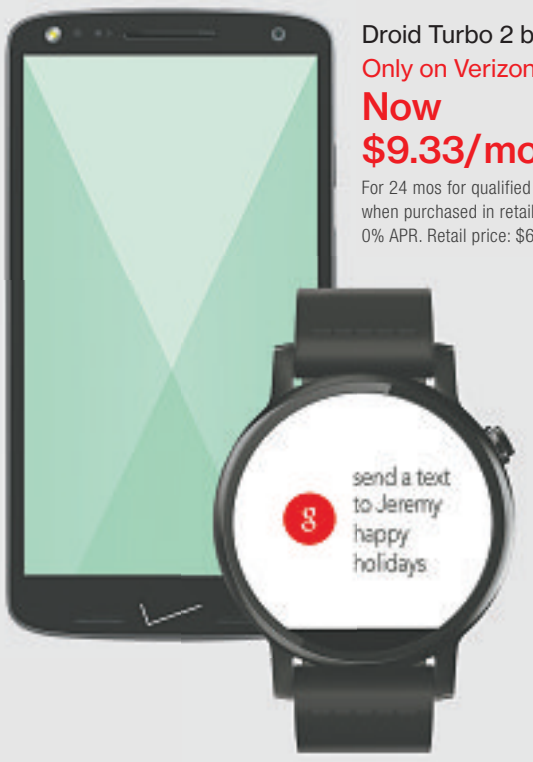

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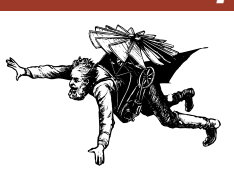

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studs&duds / FROM NEWS SERVICES

Michael B. Jordan in 'Creed'

GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO BE 'CREED'?

In addition to eating six meals a day (which included a lot of protein shakes), Michael B. Jordan worked out like a maniac for his starring role in "Creed." Here's a taste of what Jordan's trainer put him through, per Men's Journal:

- 45 to 60 minutes of cardio
- Three sets of 25 reps of ab exercises every other day
- 1-mile warmup on the treadmill
- Three rounds of box jumps (20 reps), jump squats (20 reps) and burpees (15 reps)
- Two sets of 10 reps of push-ups
- Four sets of 15 dumbbell curls
- Three hours of boxing training (heavy bag, speed bag, hitting the mitts, jump rope)

THE MOUTHWATCH

"SHE IS ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS NOW, AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF MY KIDS. ... WE'VE WORKED SO HARD AT CO-PARENTING, TO MAKE SURE THAT THEIR LIVES ARE FANTASTIC."

—**Tiger Woods**, to Time magazine, on his relationship with his ex-wife, Elin Nordegren

STOP. WATCH.

This weekend's must-see event in sports

MAC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Northern Illinois vs. Bowling Green (in Detroit) *7 p.m. Friday, ESPN2*
This marks the third-straight season the Huskies have met Bowling Green in the conference title game. The Falcons destroyed NIU in 2013 before the Huskies returned the favor last year. Even though these are not powerhouse schools, this should make for very entertaining football.

BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Iowa vs. Michigan State (in Indianapolis) *7 p.m. Saturday, Fox*
Of all the scintillating college football matchups this weekend, this one amounts to a de facto College Football Playoff quarterfinal. When you're out at the bars Saturday night and wondering why people can't stop staring at the TV, this would be why.

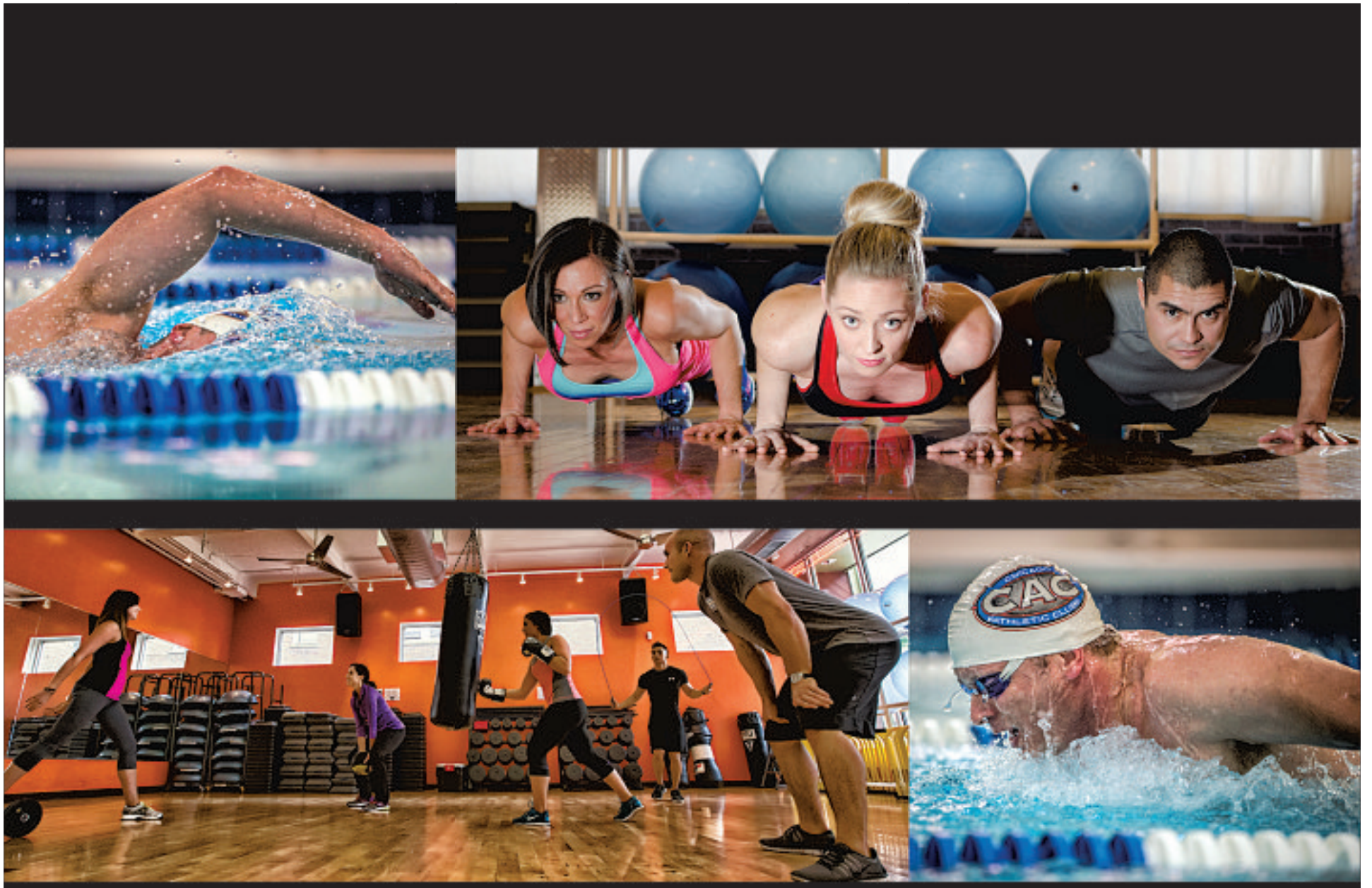
ALSO ON TAP

FRIDAY
- Wolves at Grand Rapids, 6 p.m. WCIU2

SATURDAY
- Basketball: Chicago State at DePaul, 1 p.m. Fox Sports 1
- Basketball: Loyola vs. Creighton, 1 p.m. CSN
- Basketball: Illinois vs. Western Carolina, 2 p.m. ESPN3
- Basketball: Northwestern vs. SIU-Edwardsville, 2 p.m. BTN+
- Wolves vs. Milwaukee, 7 p.m. at Allstate Arena
- Bulls vs. Charlotte, 7 p.m. WGN

SUNDAY
- Blackhawks vs. Winnipeg, 4 p.m. WGN

NOTE: THE NFL SCHEDULE IS ON PAGE 6.



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movies

Teyonah Parris as Lysistrata in 'Chi-Raq'

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

YOU NEED TO SEE SPIKE LEE'S AMBITIOUS, CONVERSATION-STARTING 'CHI-RAQ'

FAST PAISED

Matt Pais

» mpais@redeyechicago.com

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Part sermon, part stand-up special and largely, bizarrely entertaining, "Chi-Raq" likely will go down as the best (and only) rhyme-based, Greek play-inspired sex comedy to examine life in one of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods.

For obvious reasons, this isn't material that's easily summarized. The title and perceived mission of director/co-writer Spike Lee's satire, filmed here this summer, have stirred controversy for a long time, but this isn't a repeat of the formerly hot-button "The Interview," which inspired indifference rather than adoration or fury once people actually saw it. Some people will love "Chi-Raq," and some will find it appalling. It's incredibly ambitious, pretty weird and very much the work of Lee, a filmmaker long interested in fractured communities and sexual dynamics but never quite like this.

Please see it for yourself and let me know what you think.

In a star-making performance, Teyonah Parris ("Dear White People") plays Lysistrata, who's tired of the constant shootings in her Englewood community, many of which involve her boyfriend, a drill rapper proud to be known as Chi-Raq (Nick Cannon), whose dubiously located performance at Double Door ends in gunfire. (That occurs after the film's electric opening, in which lyrics to Chi-Raq's song "Pray 4 My City" appear on an otherwise blank screen). After a tip from Miss Helen (Angela Bassett) about a Liberian peace activist who advocated for a sex strike to remove one of men's top priorities and foster change, with surprising ease Lysistrata organizes her friends, the significant others of the men of Chi-Raq's rival gang (led by Wesley Snipes as Cyclops) and the rest of the area's women. Unified declarations of "Lock it up!" and a refusal to grant access to the "nappy pouch" follow.

REVIEW
Chi-Raq
R
★★★½

Despite this strategy's apparent success in Liberia, the notion that withholding sex would derail widespread violence seems absurd as Lee glosses over the actual day-to-day impact of the strike, as if once Lysistrata takes action all gang activity ceases entirely. That takes something comedic into the realm of unconvincing fantasy, getting away from being useful. It's questionable if "Chi-Raq" will add street-level dimension to what people know and don't know about this crisis, which Chicagoans know exists beyond the South Side. Does Lee justify his approach, blending aspects to take very seriously and others to not take seriously at all? I'm not sure.

Yet the film isn't trying to be a documentary or solve South Side neighborhoods' complex problems. It converts a bullet-riddled war to a battle of the sexes for an optimistic, exhilaratingly musical provocation believing that change is possible and life can prevail. Cannon displays dramatic chops you probably didn't know he had, and Samuel L. Jackson's a riot in a narrator role not far removed from his declaring, "And that's the truth, Ruth" in Lee's "Do the Right Thing." It's astounding how well-prepared the cast is for the dialogue's often-flowing verse, which might have been awkward (like when "How I Met Your Mother" tried to string a bunch of rhymes together) but consistently locks in to feel effortless (almost like the bang-bang chatter of an Aaron Sorkin-scripted effort). Frequently the movie is, yes, kinda fun.

And it's clear how much it takes to get to a place of stability. With characters like Miss Helen and John Cusack's impassioned priest inspired by Father Michael Pfleger, of Saint Sabina in Auburn Gresham, the film very directly makes notes about the lack of, among other things, trauma centers and economic development on the South Side. A connection is made between the area and Selma. A shot of Mayor Emanuel's "Building a new Chicago" sign clearly suggests that it's not happening everywhere, playing a key role in lack of opportunity and the arguably pointless revolving door of deadly revenge. The Illinois Casket company's sign ominously notes, "Open to the public," a reminder of how many people need its services.

When Irene (Jennifer Hudson) attempts to wash the blood of her murdered young daughter from the street and we hear the actress singing on the soundtrack, it's not a phony reminder that this is only a movie. It's a brilliant way to show that Hudson may have a great voice and be a star, but that didn't prevent her from experiencing this sort of tragedy firsthand. Her character declares to bystanders after discovering her child under a sheet, "It could be you next time."

What do you think?

Email **mpais@redeyechicago.com** when you see a movie and explain why you think he got it right or got it wrong. Once a month we'll publish some of the letters.
Note: Commentary including profanity or any other offensive material will not be considered.

MEMORABLE QUOTES FROM 'CHI-RAQ'

By Matt Pais | REDEYE

There are a ton of them in Spike Lee's much-discussed film, which opens Friday and considers violence on Chicago's South Side through a satirical sex comedy inspired by Aristophanes' play "Lysistrata." Here's just a sample. (Spoiler alert: If you're going to see the movie, you may want to wait to read these.)

"WE RETAIN HIS VERSE TO SHOW LOVE FOR THE UNIVERSE."
—**Dolmedes** (Samuel L. Jackson), recognizing the film's inspiration (Aristophanes' "Lysistrata") and informing that much of the film's dialogue rhymes

"Y'ALL MAKE MY TIRED ASS TIRED."
—**Miss Helen** (Angela Bassett)

"EVEN THE HOS IS NO-SHOWS."
—**Bacchos** (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), on an empty strip club, mid-sex strike

"MASS INCARCERATION IS THE NEW JIM CROW."
—**Fr. Mike Corridan** (John Cusack)

"EVEN THOUGH WE LIVE IN TERROR TOWN, WE DESERVE RESPECT."
—**Lysistrata** (Teyonah Parris)

"SPRAY PAINT, NOT BULLETS."
—Graffiti on the South Side

"NO PEACE, NO PUSSY."
—Groups of women around the world, including in Canada, Japan, the Dominican Republic, Greece, Pakistan and Brazil, supporting the sex strike

"WOMEN! YOU NEED US! DO YOUR DUTY AND GIVE UP THAT BOOTY!"
—Some of Englewood's older men, in response to the sex strike

"I'D RATHER HAVE AN AFRICAN LION IN THE WHITE HOUSE THAN A LYIN' AFRICAN."
—**Major King Kong** (David Patrick Kelly), one of many racist military officials Lysistrata and her unarmed supporters take control over

"BACK THEN IT WAS A VIOLATION OF THE GANG CODE TO MURDER A CHILD."
—**Miss Helen**

Nick Cannon as Chi-Raq

CAST TALKS CITY, 'CHI-RAQ,' CONTROVERSY

By Michael Phillips and Nina Metz | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

"Chi-Raq" will no doubt frustrate and irritate those requiring a steady, consistent tone in their social satire.

To which director/co-writer Spike Lee responded: "Whatever."

In a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, he seemed pleased with the early reception to "Chi-Raq" as well as for the official Chicago premiere, held at the Chicago Theatre.

"Some people, if it's not right down the middle of the plate ... " Lee said. He loves his sports metaphors; he loves taunting Chicago teams every chance he gets. With his films, he says, "I'm throwing curveballs, knuckleballs. Straight down the middle? That's not what I do."

In a series of interviews with the "Chi-Raq" cast, the actors reflected on the movie, the city and the controversy.

Stars Nick Cannon (who built his career as a comedic performer) and Teyonah Parris (known for buttoned-up characters on "Mad Men" and "Survivor's Remorse"), on playing against type:

Cannon: Lysistrata is unbuttoned!

Parris: [Laughs and refers to her character's barely-there costumes.] She has nothing to button! But to be able to say so early in my career I've had the opportunity to work with Spike and play such an amazing character—she's a badass—to play someone who is very confident in who she is as a woman and what she has to offer, and the power she has to tap into that, it was really exciting. And it is different from some of the other characters I've played, so I got to wild out a little bit.

Cannon: [Laughs at his co-star's pun; his MTV sketch comedy show is called "Wild 'N Out."] I feel like, at my core, I'm a character actor and that's what I've always aspired to be. The actors I look up to are able to dive into a character and lose themselves, and that was my approach on this. I'm the type of person, when I create a character I want to be that person, on and off set, to actually really figure out what the mannerisms are and the vulnerabilities. I hope that's what I accomplished here [as a hardcore gang leader and rapper]. I want people to be like, "Yo, I didn't even see the Nick Cannon I thought I knew when I watched this film."

People like to put you in a box in this industry, so this is a way to take people off-guard. It excites me as an artist to be able to say, 'Nah, you don't have me figured out.' "

Jennifer Hudson (who lost her mother, brother and nephew to gun violence in 2008), on whether her role and the film's subject matter felt too close to home (she spoke with the Tribune during the local premiere):

Hudson: Oh my God, yes. I told [Lee], "Do you realize what you're asking me to do? This is all too real for me." But then at the same time I understood. I get it. And I feel like it's something that needs to be told. I'm using my story, my tragedy, to try to help this not happen to someone else.

This is one of the hardest things I've ever done. I was literally holding my breath until it was over. I had to leave the set a few times—one time to go to what would have been my nephew's eighth-grade graduation, an honorary graduation—and then I was back to the set, so it was like: This isn't just a story in a movie. This is real. This is my life.

Wesley Snipes (as gang leader Cyclops) on "Chi-Raq" and its dramatic mashup strategy:

Snipes: It's clearly not a comedy. The most amazing thing about it, for me, is the merging of styles, fiction and nonfiction, reality and non-reality. You take individual aspects ... if you walked into the theater during certain scenes, you might think you're watching a documentary. What film lately has been so contemporary, so present? I can't recall. You're not looking at the past; you're looking at life right now, today, fictionalized, dramatized ... [although] it's not so much about Chicago as it is about our humanity. How do we allow some of these things to happen? We should take collective responsibility. And the collective should be held accountable.

D.B. Sweeney, playing the city's buffoonish mayor, on the pharaoh headdress he wears during a scene in the movie. Might that be an allusion to Richard J. Daley and the account of his time in office in the nonfiction book "American Pharaoh"?

Sweeney: That's the inspiration. I didn't know what kind of Chicago mayor I was playing. Spike just said, "Do you want to play the mayor?" and I said, "Absolutely." So I started broadly researching the role and read up on Mayor Daley senior and Mayor Daley junior. And [current Mayor] Emanuel, I went to his second-term inauguration here in Chicago, just to observe all the politics and rituals of all the aldermen. It was fascinating.

I thought it was great to be making the movie while everyone was debating the title. I've been doing this for 33 years, and sometimes you make movies and nobody cares. But when people care, it's the greatest thing in the world—even when it's passionately against the title, because it's going to start a conversation.

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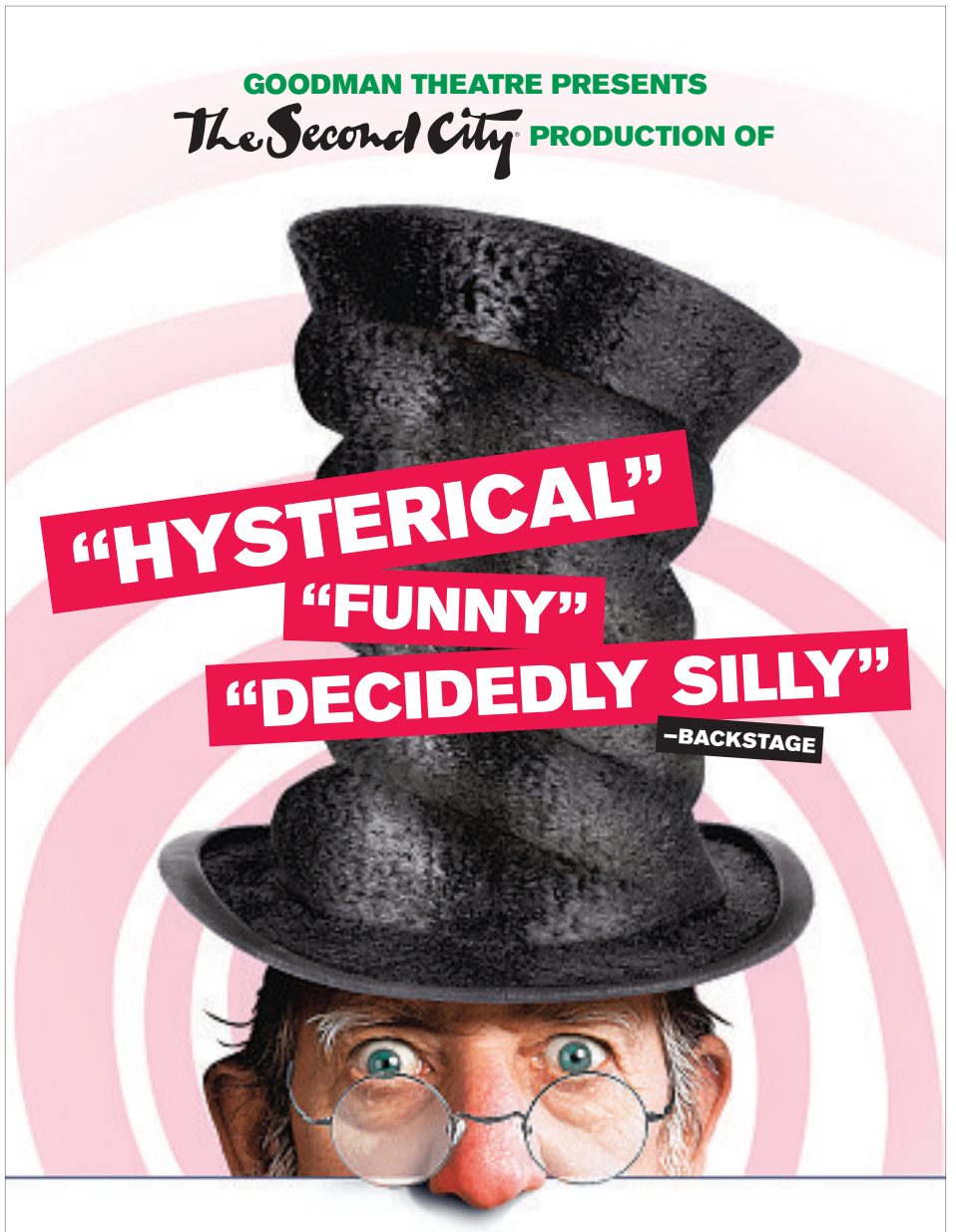

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Violence interrupter Ameena Matthews (from left) with producer/director Steve James, producer Alex Kotlowitz and co-producer/sound recordist Zak Piper filming 'The Interrupters'

BEYOND 'CHI-RAQ'

5 MOVIES (AND A SERIES) ABOUT CHICAGO VIOLENCE

By Nina Metz | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Recently fielding questions about whether a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based director could accurately capture the Chicago experience, "Chi-Raq" director Spike Lee added, almost as an afterthought: "Why hasn't a Chicago filmmaker done a film, then?"

There actually are Chicago filmmakers who have focused on black life—and the cycle of thwarted opportunities and gun violence—on the city's South and West sides. You likely haven't heard of these movies and multipart series. Low-budget often means low-profile, and I don't know that Lee (or any other directors or producers operating on his level) should necessarily know about these smaller projects. Few Chicagoans do. But that doesn't mean these types of films are not being made.

With that in mind, here is a list of various films, both fiction and nonfiction, that work either as a complement or a counterpoint to "Chi-Raq." I should note that this list is by no means comprehensive, and there are more projects coming down the pike, but for now I have included only those that currently can be streamed.

THE INTERRUPTERS

You can stream the full movie for free at ***www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/interrupters.***

This 2011 Kartemquin documentary from renowned Chicago filmmaker Steve James ("Hoop Dreams") follows the efforts of "violence interrupters" as they attempt to de-escalate violence and retribution on the city's South and West sides.

TAKIN' PLACE

The movie is available for a $5 one-week rental or an $8 download at ***www.vimeo.com/ondemand/takinplacemovie.***

Cyrus Dowlatshahi's nonfiction film premiered in August at the Gene Siskel Film Center. "A slice-of-life chronicle that has a terrific off-the-cuff quality to it, 'Takin' Place' isn't the sort of movie that sets out to examine specific problems or spotlight organizations working to improve things," I wrote earlier this year. (That said, it absolutely does depict the impact of gun violence and the feelings of precariousness that generates.) "Dowlatshahi has done something different, by seeking out people and places that he found interesting in and of themselves, not merely because of their proximity to drugs or violence or financial hardships." It captures the texture of the South Side, where problems are acute but so is a sardonic humor.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

The movie is now available for $14.99 on iTunes.

The Chicago songwriter and rapper Rhymefest (aka Che Smith), best known for his Grammy- and Oscar-winning collaborations with Kanye West and Common, seeks out his estranged father—who has been an alcoholic and homeless for more than two decades—in this documentary, which opened in theaters last month.

The film's title refers to the house Rhymefest bought with his wife not long ago in Chatham: the very same home where his father was raised.

THE LIC (LIFE IN CHICAGO)

The movie can be streamed for free on YouTube.

This feature-length narrative from writer-director Soundman has the gritty realism I suspect some hope to find in "Chi-Raq." It meanders and doesn't have a clear plot (the two-hour running time could stand to lose 30 minutes), but it captures a world that feels lived-in and true. An ex-con known as Rah Rah (played by Soundman) is still behind bars at the movie's start, talking with another inmate about getting a job when he gets out, washing cars or something like that. "Washing cars?" comes the scoffing response. "We getting ready to take some ... cars, man." Once Rah Rah is released he intends to go legit, but the film tracks precisely why circumstances in specific Chicago neighborhoods conspire against that kind of change.

CHIRAQ

The series can be streamed for free at ***noisey.vice.com/chiraq/welcome-to-chiraq.***

Poverty, rage, frustration and violence gave rise to Chicago's drill music scene (and notably Chief Keef), and this eight-part 2014 series from Vice focuses on the ways in which the music reinforces (and feeds off of) the precariousness of life in neighborhoods such as Englewood. The beef against Vice documentaries has long been that of white hipsters trafficking in cultural tourism (and not everyone agrees with that criticism, by the way). The series would benefit from some judicious editing to tighten up its many slack portions, but as a documentary its intentions are earnest. And as a primer on drill music and the circumstances that birthed it, "Chiraq" gets the job done.

MORE THAN A BULLET

The movie can be streamed for free on YouTube.

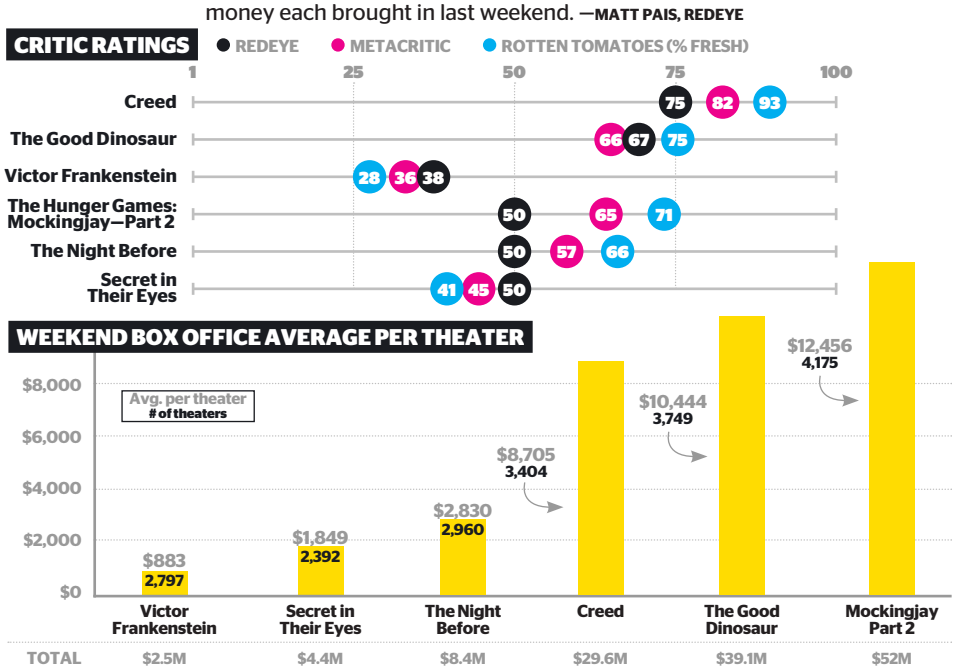
This film is probably closest in spirit to Spike Lee's 2006 Hurricane Katrina documentary, "When the Levees Broke." From Chicagoans Nick Davis (producer) and Evan W. Staley (director), the 45-minute documentary has a sharp look and sound, exploring the many factors (historical and otherwise) that have led to a community where gun violence is an everyday occurrence. Staley talks with members of the NLMB (Never Leave My Brothers) gang and asks if they think the police are there to protect them. The reply: "You already dead on the floor by the time they pull up." The filmmakers also interview hip-hop artists who talk about why the elimination of after-school programs has left young people adrift to become absorbed into street life, and all that implies.

Seeming to anticipate the controversy over Lee's decision to use the word as the title for a film, rapper Roosevelt the Titan notes: "People from outside, you don't got the right to be wearing no Chiraq hat. It's not advertising. You don't brand it."

movies

movie business

With a new batch of movies opening, you may be digging through your brain to remember what else came out recently. Here's a look back at what I thought about some of the movies, an idea of how critical aggregators rate them and how much money each brought in last weekend. —MATT PAIS, REDEYE



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Heating up

Fresh pasta decorates the bar at Monteverde.
MICHAEL TERCHA/TRIBUNE

NOODLES & COMPANY

MONTEVERDE IS A PASTA PALACE IN WEST LOOP

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

What does a reality TV chef from Houston who started out cooking Creole cuisine know about Italian food? It turns out a lot. In fact, you could say Sarah Grueneberg, executive chef and partner of Monteverde, a new restaurant and pastificio (a fancy name for a pasta or macaroni factory) in Chicago's West Loop, is a master and innovator of the form.

GREEN MOUNTAIN RISING

It wasn't always that way. "I'm a kid from Texas who grew up cooking at Brennan's in Houston where soulful Creole sauces were the thing," Grueneberg said. "When I first moved to Chicago to work as a line cook, my idea of Italian food was very Italian American, stuff like parmesan, ricotta, marsala. I was lost over the idea that you could make this fantastic sauce with only simple olive oil."

That was 2005. By 2008, Grueneberg was running the kitchen at Spiaggia. Inspired by trips to Italy, the tasting menus she was producing at what was already a four-star restaurant hit their peak. Frankly, I was a little sad when she set off to do "Top Chef: Texas" in 2011, where she placed as runner-up to winner Paul Qui, because I missed her cooking. She returned but left Spiaggia in 2013 to build her own restaurant with partner Meg Colleran Sahs (Terzo Piano). I couldn't wait to check it out.

In her time off, Grueneberg consulted and traveled. She returned often to Emilia-Romagna, a region in northern Italy, where she stayed busy eating and forging friendships. One of those friends, Andrea Bezzecchi, a noted balsamic vinegar producer of Acetaia San Giacomo, unknowingly named her future restaurant. "I carry a travel journal and I ask people I meet to write in it. My name is German for green mountain," Grueneberg said. "Andrea had written in my journal that from now on when I come to Italy I would be known as Monteverde, the Italian translation of my last name. I was so taken. I loved the fact that these people had accepted me into their culture."

VINEGAR BARRELS AND A PASTA FACTORY

Though Karen Herold of Studio K (Perennial Virant, Girl and the Goat, Balena and more) designed the homey restaurant interior filled with honey-colored woods, blue- and plum-hued chairs and beige accents, Bezzecchi had some influence on the decor as well. Above the bar at Monteverde, there's a group of wooden barrels made of mulberry, acacia, ash and chestnut. While they look cool, they're also a functional working solera system that produces aged balsamic vinegar that will eventually be used in the restaurant. That alone would be cool, but just below those barrels is a working pasta factory, where thousands of noodles dry and fresh pasta is filled and rolled to order.

SNACK TIME

But before we get to the pasta, we should talk about snacks (stuzzichini) and small plates (piattini). We should also discuss Grueneberg's sly genius. Lots of people fall in love with Italy, come back and try to replicate what they ate with good intentions, ending up with classic but uninspired facsimile dishes. What sets Grueneberg apart is that she's not only an Italian cook but an international one. Her dishes are Italian in spirit but spiked with ingredients and techniques inspired by travels to Spain, Asia and the American South.

Consider octopus spiedini ($8): Fat, wobbly, seawater-kissed octopus tentacles and char-grilled leeks are skewered alongside

The Mozzarella e Ham
MICHELLE KANAAR PHOTO FOR REDEYE

salt-roasted sweet potatoes dusted with smoked paprika. The skewers are nestled in a peperonata made of roasted red pepper, onion and tomato. It's sweet, smoky and addictive, a superior Italian salsa I lapped from my spoon long after the octopus was gone. "When I went to Tokyo, the grocery stores had pre-packaged yakitori that was amazing," Grueneberg said. "I was like, 'If the shish kabob in my grocery stores looked like that here, I'd be all over it.' I wanted to bring that to Monteverde."

Her arancini ($7) is filled with creamy Italian rice, but it's also brimming with 'nduja, spreadable Italian salami bursting with chili and salty notes. The finished product is mounted on oil-poached tuna.

There's a plate called mozzarella e ham ($13) that looked suspiciously like a caprese salad of sorts, sans basil. Though I trust Grueneberg, visions of rubbery, waterlogged mozzarella and insipid tomatoes danced in my head. But I was rewarded with orbs of mozzarella di bufala so creamy I'm convinced it was actually burrata. Though it's December, cherry tomatoes from Mighty Vine of Rochelle, Ill., were a deep shade of crimson and exploded with the fruity essence of summer.

NOODLES AND COMPANY

Not only does Grueneberg cook with international flavors, but she's always been committed to expanding her repertoire beyond the Italian kitchen. Prior to the "Top Chef" finale, she staged with Bill Kim of the "Belly" empire, and as a result of that relationship was inspired to wok-fire orecchiette for her arrabbiata ($15), which features plump gulf shrimp, toasted garlic, tomato and hot pepper oil. I liked the heat and the shrimp, but there could be a touch more tomato here, and the pasta is a bit overcooked and soft.

But this is easy to forgive when followed by steamed pinwheel rounds of housemade cannelloni saltimbocca ($15) stuffed with lamb belly, manchego, prosciutto and sage. The rounds are caramelized in the pan and plated with a nutty, velvety-smooth cauliflower bechamel. The combination is richer than a hedge fund manager, but a smart swoosh of balsamic vinegar lightens the load and keeps each bite from sending me into a carb-induced slumber.

You could wisely spend all your stomach capacity on pasta here, but there are other options to consider. I opted for the stuffed cabbage ($12-$14) featuring a ragu of mushrooms, corn-perfumed fleece-soft polenta, a runny duck egg and a cabbage leaf stuffed with mustard greens, parsnips, kohlrabi and saltine crackers spiked with nutmeg and allspice. The aromatic cabbage filling was certainly better than the oversteamed rice and beef glop I had at so many Polish buffets growing up.

SUNDAES AND SALTED BUTTERSCOTCH BUDINO

A few weeks ago, I raved about the talents of Meg Galus, pastry chef of Boka Group. I am currently equally smitten with the work of Monteverde pastry chef Sara Lamb (Soho House). Her budino ($8) is custardy, salty, sweet and crowned with a crackling sugar top. I'd take this over creme brulee all day. She also whips up a sundae ($8) featuring milk and honey ice creams drizzled with caramel and topped with a sesame-studded praline with bittersweet notes that delighted and jolted me from what could have been a sugary stupor.

BOTTOM LINE

Grueneberg has managed to create an a la carte Italian experience fused with Spanish and Asian flavors for those who crave the technique and ingredient quality of Spiaggia but don't have the extravagant budget to dine there.

REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR.

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WINTER SUCKS
WILDCARD

Protect your holiday packages from thieves

By Leonor Vivanco | REDEYE

All those deals you snagged on Cyber Monday—traditionally the biggest online shopping day—may be arriving soon in the mail. And in a few weeks, you might be expecting holiday gifts at your apartment.

Chances are you can't sit around at home waiting for your special delivery. Instead you cross your fingers that your packages are there waiting for you when you get home from work.

As more people shop online, there's more opportunity for thieves to steal packages not just this time of year but year-round, said Mark Reynolds, U.S. Postal Service spokesman.

Just look at the statistics: This year's Cyber Monday sales surpassed $3 billion, up 16 percent compared with last year, according to Adobe Digital Index, which published research based on data of more than 125 million visits to 4,500 retail websites. Online shopping from Thanksgiving Day through Cyber Monday was estimated by Adobe to total $11 billion this year, an increase of 15 percent over last year.

Between Black Friday and Christmas Eve, FedEx is projecting it will move 317 million shipments in its global network, a 12.4 percent increase compared with last year, according to a news release.

"More and more people are shopping online. That means we're delivering more and more packages to doorsteps and front porches," Erin Truxal, FedEx global media manager, told RedEye.

Additionally, the U.S. Postal Service is estimating 600 million packages will be delivered between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, an increase of 10.5 percent over last year, according to a release.

UPS, which delivers about 18 million packages every day, said in a statement that theft incidents involving UPS deliveries are rare and that the rate has been relatively flat over the past few years.

Still, with all those packages arriving, Reynolds pointed to the phrase, "If you see something, say something."

If you notice a car following a postal truck or someone swiping packages, report it to the police. If you suspect a package was stolen, report it to the police and the entity that handled the delivery.

"The package you save may be your own," Reynolds said.

From social media to surveillance videos, people across the country have warned others to be aware of thieves taking packages from building lobbies and front porches. Last month, a man was charged with stealing packages from apartment buildings in Lakeview and Bucktown, the Tribune reported.

Chicago Police didn't provide any stats on package thefts, but last year authorities told RedEye that the police department does not keep data tracking the rate of package thefts separately from other kinds of theft.

Rather than rushing home to make sure the Grinch didn't steal Christmas or those presents, here's how you can protect yourself from becoming a victim of the five-finger discount.

1. Get personal. You can customize your home deliveries, tell the driver when and where to leave the package, and get notified of when the package will be delivered through FedEx's Delivery Manager, U.S. Postal Service's My USPS, and UPS My Choice. You can use startups Doorman or Shurpa for on-demand delivery service in which packages can get sent to a dedicated location. They'll notify you when the package arrives, and you can schedule the delivery at night, when you're home from work.

2. Be alert. Sign up to get email and text alerts on your phone to check on the status of the delivery.

3. Change plans. You can redirect your packages to your office, friend or neighbor to accept the delivery even if the package is mid-route by using the shipping company's customizable options. The U.S. Postal Service can intercept a package with a tracking number for a $12 fee that is charged only if the package gets intercepted.

4. Sign here. Require a signature for packages to get delivered if you're waiting for a package or sending one.

5. Hold it. Reroute the package to the nearest FedEx Office location, where they can hold it for up to five business days for free. Packages can also be stored at a UPS Access Point location that is open late at night and on weekends. You can store your package at the post office like you can while you're on vacation.

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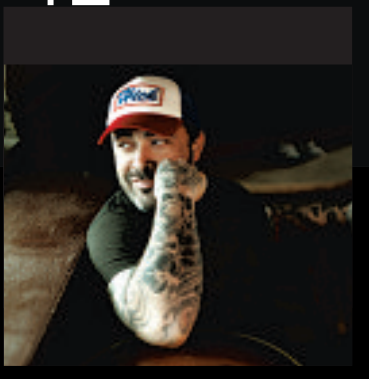

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music

Lollapalooza 2015
BRIAN NGUYEN/TRIBUNE FILE

IS A 4-DAY LOLLA A GOOD IDEA?

By Matt Pais and Josh Terry | REDEYE

THE BASICS

To celebrate the fest's 25th anniversary, Lolla will be a four-day event in 2016, held Thursday, July 28, to Sunday, July 31, in Grant Park. Tickets are $335 for a four-day pass; on-sale info and lineup details are coming in the spring.

Matt: Josh! I know you always say you wish Lolla could be a monthlong event, so you must be happy about this, right?

Josh: Ha. By the time Lollapalooza comes around, it can be exhausting. I've actually never done a four-day festival, and the few events that I know go that long are Bonnaroo and Firefly (in Dover, Del.), which are both camping festivals. While my legs are already tired at the news of an added day, it might work?

Matt: Yeah, it's hard to say if this is wise or not at this point. Let's break it down.

THE LENGTH

Matt: I question if Chicagoans and Chicagoans-for-a-weekend want an extra day. While I've never done a four-day fest either, a three-day event has a certain symmetry to it: the excitement of the opening day, the stability of the second day, the final push on the last day. Now it's a haul. Plus it will mean people having to take another day off of work.

Josh: Since we haven't seen the lineup and it's all speculation about what kind of bill we're going to get, it's tough to really say. My personal thoughts whenever I'm at a music festival are, "I like this but there's a little too much of everything," so I'm not too thrilled but also not too upset about it. That said, Lolla is a destination festival: People come to Chicago for this show, and I can't see them being upset about taking another day off from work.

I do think that Lollapalooza's demographic has always skewed younger—kids on summer break, be it from college or high school. Many are coming into town on vacation, and many got considerably more expensive tickets on the secondary market. The cost won't be a huge burden on some of them, especially since many parents are footing the bill, and the extra day is an added bonus for younger kids on summer vacation.

THE PRICE

Matt: I think people will grumble about the price but also do the math about how much they're spending per day, sigh, realize it's not a deterrent and still pay. The prices have gone up a lot over the years—if memory serves, it used to be $60/day. Now $335 for a four-day pass is about $84/day. Do you think that's an issue?

Josh: I think in many ways it is. I understand that much of the cost goes to paying bands (a good thing) and cleaning up the park (also good), but for less-affluent kids looking to go to a festival, the experience is getting way less reachable, which is a huge bummer. I remember almost 10 years ago prices being less than half of what they are now and still thinking at the time that was absurd. I probably wouldn't have gone had the tickets been this expensive.

THE NUMBER OF BANDS

Matt: And it's ironic because the festival says it's trying to be inclusive in the sense that it has received 50 percent more submissions from "credible bands" wanting to play the fest and it didn't want to have to say no to a lot of them, though obviously the financial element doesn't make the event as accessible. But about the bands: While I'm reluctant to complain about more music, and 170 bands in four days is (imagine my eyes being very wide right now), I do worry about the quality being diluted. We're already at a point at which we see the same bands over and over (enough Delta Spirit, seriously!!!) and struggle to find legit headliners. Adding an extra day will only extend those problems, even if it means getting to see a few more good acts we wouldn't have gotten to otherwise. Although they probably just would have played another Chicago fest in that case. Are you excited about having 40 more bands, or concerned?

Josh: No, I'm not really excited. I've been pretty disappointed with the quality of both the undercard and the headliners in recent years. Does the extra day mean we get Mumford and Sons along with Muse, Kings of Leon and Foo Fighters? I kid, but I wouldn't put it past them. How much do you wanna bet Lollapalooza is going to bring back its original 1991 acts in Jane's Addiction and Nine Inch Nails?

Matt: Lolla remains my favorite Chicago fest because of the quantity—I'm never waiting around for someone I care about to go on, I'm always able to find that on one of the 96 (I mean, eight) stages. Not the case for me at Riot Fest or Pitchfork (both of which I still enjoy). But there are still too many acts at Lolla that either shouldn't be there at all or that we've just seen too many times before. Jane's and NIN are reasonable predictions. Think it will be Kanye? Adele? Jay Z and Beyonce together? Or four days of Sam Smith?

Josh: I hope it's Kanye and Adele, though I'm not sure if a festival is the best setting to absorb her music. Maybe Chance the Rapper could graduate from headlining Pitchfork for another heart-swelling hometown show. Whatever it is, there are going to be a lot of exhausted folks coming into work on Monday. It'll be an interesting experiment, and I hope it works out for the festival going forward. I also hope I survive it.

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Admit it: Coldplay's really fun on new album

SOUND BOARD
Josh Terry
» jterry@redeyechicago.com
» @joshhterry

Saying you're a huge Coldplay fan has historically been like saying ketchup is spicy and vanilla ice cream really gets a bum rap. The band has never been cool—in 2008 Rolling Stone deemed frontman Chris Martin "The Jesus of Uncool"—and the British pop-rockers' fans, of which there are boatloads, know this: You're more likely to hear "I'm a huge Coldplay fan except for 'X&Y' " or "I'm a huge Coldplay fan but I think Chris Martin is kind of a dork" than total, unabashed fandom.

That's both understandable and a shame, as underneath the "wuss-rock" tag meaner critics have assigned Coldplay over the years is a surprisingly solid band. From its stellar 2000 debut "Parachutes" to 2014's understated "Ghost Stories," Coldplay has consistently churned out totally sincere and effective stadium rock. Even the band's critically-panned albums like "X&Y" (about which even Martin admitted, "We were bigger than we were good") have some worthy moments. And the band will reportedly be headlining halftime at Super Bowl 50, according to the Associated Press.

There's also a lot to love on Coldplay's seventh and probably final album, "A Head Full of Dreams" (out Friday). Where its predecessor "Ghost Stories" was a dour and moody autopsy of a divorce, the new album happily takes a more uplifting, resilient tone.

There's lead single "Adventure of a Lifetime," whose Chic-esque guitars and fittingly adventurous electronic atmospheres make it one of the most sonically interesting things the band's ever produced. Beyonce joins anthem "Hymn for the Weekend," which continues Coldplay's fondness for having a pop star guest on a rousing single and is the best of the bunch. Where Coldplay's previous attempts at crossing over to dance-pop seemed contrived and pandering, much of this effort feels organic and legitimately fun.

Chris Martin of Coldplay performs at the American Music Awards in November. AP PHOTO

Of course, Martin's lyrics always have the subtlety of a lovelorn teen's diary, but matched with the band's bombastic, grandiose compositions, there's enough affecting heartstring-tugging to yank away some if not all of your cynicism. When Martin sings, "Oh, I can feel my heart beating/'Cause you make me feel/Like I'm alive again" on "Adventure of a Lifetime," you can feel it too. (Well, I can.) Other times, like the overwrought reading of Rumi's poem "The Guest House" and a sample of President Obama's "Amazing Grace" speech on interlude "Kaleidoscope," it ventures into irredeemable self-parody.

While Coldplay earnestly wearing its heart on its sleeve can make the band seem corny, that's also its most powerful weapon. Plus, when you hear a melody as potent and cathartic as closer "Up&Up," the first thing that comes to mind probably isn't, "I wish this was less on-the-nose and obviously resonant!" At least, it shouldn't be.

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Bill Murray gifts us with musical holiday special

By Steve Johnson | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Hearing that Netflix is showing an all-new Bill Murray Christmas special is one thing. Why shouldn't Murray front an all-star gathering, like Bing Crosby and Stephen Colbert before him?

Actually seeing it is another. Murray isn't just a sometime presence in this holiday hour that nods to, and then winks at, the televised yule fabrications of yore.

A Very Murray Christmas
2:01 a.m. Friday, Netflix

He's everywhere, a laconically dominant presence amid a cast that includes celebrated folk from George Clooney to Amy Poehler to Chris Rock to Miley Cyrus to the rock band Phoenix.

And more than mid-period Bill Murray, comic actor and killer talk show guest, or more recent Bill Murray, poster child for acute big-screen melancholy, he's Bill Murray, lounge singer, like a real-life version of Nick, his 1970s "Saturday Night Live" character who invented lyrics to the "Star Wars" theme (and who was developed at Chicago's The Second City).

"A Very Murray Christmas," though, presents Murray as more or less himself, a famous person with famous friends who somehow got talked into doing a live musical Christmas Eve special by chirpy producers played by Poehler and Julie White.

He isn't all that happy about it. But any viewer who likes Murray's act—extreme self-effacement punctuated by deadpan brilliance; disaffection duking it out with a desire for sincerity—will be very happy with this program indeed.

The show opens with Murray and his piano player, Paul Shaffer, doing a doleful but relatively straight-faced "Christmas Blues" in his suite at New York's Carlyle Hotel.

A snowstorm comes in and keeps his guests away. But satellite time has been paid for and so the show must go on, which it does, sort of.

Various plot machinations bring on Michael Cera as a would-be agent and Rashida Jones as a troubled bride weeping at her ruined wedding, and Clooney shows up with Cyrus in an elaborately produced dream sequence. Especially effective are Maya Rudolph belting out "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)," Cyrus singing "Silent Night" in a red mini Santa dress on a white piano and Jenny Lewis (Rilo Kiley) trading lines with Murray on "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

Amy Poehler (from left), Bill Murray and Julie White in 'A Very Murray Christmas'

Murray himself is an engaging musical presence, even over so many songs. He's no Harry Connick Jr., but he can mostly carry a tune and he can definitely carry the camera's interest.

There isn't much to this special except for some great songs and deft piano playing, a handful of sharp laughs, and all that Bill Murray cultural resonance, which really has become its own kind of force field. And that, it turns out, is plenty.

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Slow but beautiful change in 'Transparent' Season 2

By Mary McNamara | LOS ANGELES TIMES

There is no American border as perilous as the one separating self-knowledge from self-absorption, and as the second season of Amazon's "Transparent" proves, no one charts it as fearlessly, humanely and thoroughly as Jill Soloway.

"Transparent" debuted last year with a deceptively simple, albeit revolutionary, hook: Well into middle age, transgender woman Mort Pfefferman (Jeffrey Tambor) finally decides to live her authentic life as Maura.

Transparent
Season 2
Amazon Prime

(Episode 1 available now, later episodes available Dec. 11)

"Transparent" is undoubtedly one of the richest and most ambitious half-hour comedies ever. It is a tale of transition, a deconstruction of gender, a story of family and, in the second season, an exploration of faith and history.

But more than anything, it bravely takes on the often-infuriating modern notion of self. How does one search for personal truth without collapsing into narcissism?

It's certainly a question that drives the second season of "Transparent" in which each Pfefferman wrestles with bravery, brattiness and the dangers of an overly examined life.

The first episode is a bit of a mess, with Maura's daughter Sarah having a breakdown and a series of flashbacks to 1920s Berlin, but it gives "Transparent" more elbow room, and the episodes that follow take full advantage.

Though still heroic in her decision, Maura is more fully realized, a woman who can be selfish, judgmental and who, having lived for so long as a man, has been guilty of the same prejudice she now faces. But it's the Pfefferman children who now struggle to live authentic lives. They are all so obviously wounded and selfish, emotional hypochondriacs whose pain is real but mostly self-inflicted. As Maura is discovering, revelation is not change. Change is change. It comes slowly, with effort, and it is maddening, and beautiful, to watch.

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	4	7		2				
				3	1			5
3		2					7	
7				1				6
	6					2		4
5			2	7				
				9		3	5	
	7			6	3			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

7	2	1	6	9	3	8	4	5
5	8	9	7	2	4	3	1	6
6	3	4	5	1	8	7	9	2
9	6	3	2	8	5	1	7	4
8	7	5	3	4	1	2	6	9
4	1	2	9	6	7	5	3	8
3	5	6	4	7	2	9	8	1
1	9	7	8	5	6	4	2	3
2	4	8	1	3	9	6	5	7

THURSDAY'S SOLUTIONS

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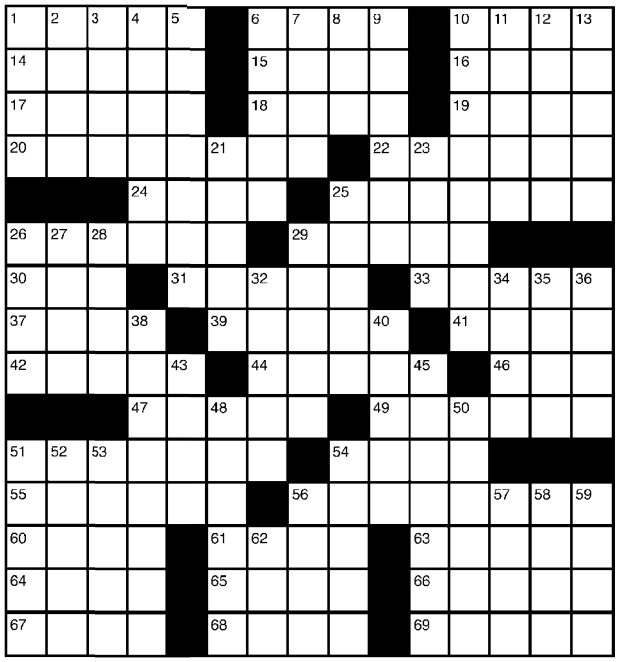
BRAIN CANDY

» The longest-living individual animal ever was a clam named Ming that lived for 507 years.
» There are approximately 3.04 trillion trees on Earth, but 15 billion are cut down every year.
» 7-Up once contained lithium as a primary ingredient.
» Our brains have actually shrunk over the course of human evolution.



ACROSS
1 Have a snack
6 Fellow
10 Final
14 Met production
15 Animal pelt
16 _ for; compassionate with
17 Baffling question
18 Element whose symbol is Fe
19 Godsend
20 Musical group
22 Wispy cloud
24 Combine
25 _ sauce; spicy condiment
26 Voice box
29 Felt miserable
30 Small digit
31 _ for; desire greatly
33 Steer clear of
37 Polaris or Betelgeuse
39 Equestrian
41 _ on; have confidence in
42 Like a three-minute egg
44 Pete & Charlie
46 Director Spike
47 Be indecisive
49 Supportive nations
51 Quarreled
54 Sheet of ice on the ocean
55 Lubricating
56 "...O'er the _ we watched..."
60 Café au _; coffee with milk
61 Imitated
63 Potato exporter
64 Suffix for differ or persist
65 Four and five
66 At no time
67 Mothers of fawns
68 Rolls the hair
69 Say hello to

DOWN
1 Sulk
2 Come _; find
3 Scottish monster's lake
4 Spine-chilling
5 Peace; accord
6 Cold sensation
7 Bring on board
8 Needless fuss
9 Writing implement
10 _ retriever; popular dog
11 Oak nut
12 Yell
13 Not relaxed
21 Ali or Spinks
23 Frosted
25 Evergreens
26 Unable to find one's way
27 Prefix for body or septic
28 Enlarge a hole
29 Zeal
32 Showed on TV
34 Sandwich shop
35 _ club; school singing group
36 Peepers
38 Starts a letter over
40 Kingdom
43 "Phooey!"
45 Like a hillside
48 Meat shunners
50 Director
51 Installed shoe bottoms
52 Stringed instrument
53 "_ Blue Gown"
54 Loses color
56 Monthly cost
57 Talk wildly
58 You, biblically
59 Put in order
62 Dessert choice

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THE DIGIT

14

That's how many times **Pamela Anderson** will have graced the cover of Playboy magazine in her career. The actress will be on the cover of Playboy's last nude issue, according to **eonline.com**. "I got a call from [Hugh Hefner's] attorney who said, 'We don't want anybody else. There's nobody else, could you do the last cover of Playboy?' " she told Entertainment Tonight. Anderson's 14 cover appearances and 15 pictorials will mean she has appeared in the magazine more than any other woman, according to **eonline.com**.

New 'Thor' writer

Stephany Folsom has been hired to work on the script for the third installment of the "Thor" franchise. Folsom previously wrote the 2013 Black List script "1969: A Space Odyssey or How Kubrick Learned to Stop Worrying and Land on the Moon," according to **thr.com**. Taika Waititi is set to direct the film, titled "Thor: Ragnarok," which **collider.com** has reported is set to start filming next year.

Han shot first

We're kidding. Maybe. Who knows? But anyway. **Harrison Ford**'s shoes are going to be tough to fill, but according to **thr.com**, about 2,500 people think they can fill 'em. Disney is looking for an actor to play a young Han Solo in an upcoming "Star Wars" spinoff movie, which is expected to start filming in January 2017 for a May 25, 2018, release, according to THR. Actors who have auditioned in person or on videotape include Dave Franco, Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Miles Teller, and others who have put their names in include Colton Haynes and Ansel Elgort, THR reported. Damnnn.

Lady of the year

Billboard has named **Lady Gaga** their Woman of the Year. "It speaks volumes to me that I'm being recognized as Woman of the Year in 2015," Gaga said. "This is the year I did what I wanted instead of trying to keep up with what I thought everyone else wanted from me." Did she even make music this year? We kid. We're happy for her. Let's just make sure she knows what festival she's looking at next year.

We miss you, Phil

"90210" star Jason Priestley is directing a Phil Hartman biopic called "Nice Guy Phil," according to **variety.com**. Actor Daran Norris will star as the late comedian, who died in 1998 after being shot by his wife. The film is expected to "explore the comedy and emotional challenges that Hartman faced," according to Variety.

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